



April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Itasca County Board of Commissioners  
Leo Trunt, 2018 Board Chair  
Itasca County Courthouse  
123 NE 4<sup>th</sup> St, Grand Rapids, MN 55744

RE : Possible Closure or Defunding of Bowstring Airport

Dear Mr. Trunt,

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is the world's largest aviation organization, representing 330,000 pilots, aircraft owners, and aviation enthusiasts, of which nearly 5,900 reside in the State of Minnesota. AOPA has been made aware that the Itasca County Board of Commissioners are considering the option to close or defund the operations at Bowstring Airport. On behalf of our membership, AOPA opposes the closure of this airport and would ask that the County Commission maintain the funding and operation of the airport.

According to the Itasca County 2018 Budget, Bowstring Airport has been appropriated \$15,000. Looking back to 2012, the county has budgeted at least \$14,000 per year for the upkeep and operation of Bowstring Airport. Minnesota Department of Transportation-Aeronautics also supplements the county at \$5,000 for maintenance and upkeep under their state grant program. It appears the money spent is purely for upkeep and general maintenance as the airport manager must use his own personal equipment for mowing and snow removal operations. Staff at MnDOT Aeronautics have made it clear they are in full support of Bowstring Airport remaining open and are willing to work with Itasca County in providing additional grant funding for equipment to be used for airport upkeep.

Although the airport does not offer services that can be found at larger airports, Bowstring is still used by local and transient pilots for back country flight training purposes, recreation, and sightseeing flights. The airport is an asset to the local economy. Aircraft utilizing the Bowstring Airport frequent the Grand Rapids Airport for fuel and other services provided there. The hangar owners at Bowstring pay county property tax at 10 cents per square foot. The Bowstring Shores Resort is known to host pilots visiting the area, as the resort is within walking distance from the airport. **These are direct benefits and cashflow from Bowstring Airport to Itasca County, and Itasca County business and tourism.**

Bowstring Airport hosts a 2,531-foot-long turf runway and is 150 feet wide. On the surface, the airport may seem unused or underutilized, and a drain on the county funds. To the non-pilot, grass airstrips may seem outdated. In reality, the airport is sought out by pilots who prefer landing on grass over paved surfaces. In the winter season, aircraft equipped with snow skis find the airport as a welcome



haven for their unique operations. Aircraft equipped with large tundra tires seek out turf runways to save wear and tear on the specialty tires that would otherwise become quickly worn on paved runways.

Another factor to consider is that by closing any landing area, you would be essentially taking away a runway that could be used in an emergency situation by aircraft passing over the area. If an in-flight emergency arose, like an engine failure, pilots are trained to point the aircraft in the direction of the closest airport or suitable landing area, paved or not.

Maintained turf landing areas are becoming a rarity in Northern Minnesota. Airports like Bemidji and Park Rapids have lost their turf runways. This is a sad pattern of losing grass runways that AOPA's membership would like to see reversed. Minnesota is home to a style of aviation that allows for unique opportunities that pilots cannot find anywhere else in the country. This is an opportunity for the county administration to keep an aviation tradition alive and accessible for future generations of aviation.

AOPA, along with other local groups like the Minnesota Pilots Association, Recreational Aviation Foundation, local pilots and aircraft owners who use the airport on a regular basis stand in full support of maintaining the funding for Bowstring Airport.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely

Mark R. Baker  
President & CEO

CC:  
Davin Tinquist, Board Member  
Terry Snyder, Board Member  
Burl Ives, Board Member  
Ben DeNucci, Board Member  
Brett Skyles, County Administrator